

Talking In Your Sleep by orphan_account

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Summary:

A girl sits in her bedroom reading a book and listening to music, when her radio turns on suddenly to a confession.

1. Eavesdropper

Author's Note:

im actually really proud of this so please share it
thanks

“Mike, there’s something I need to tell you.”

Each of the members of the party had their own walkie channel if you needed to contact them privately. Mike had channel 6, El was tuned to channel 11 (obviously), Lucas was on channel 3, Will listened in on channel 14, and Dustin was on channel 7. However, Max had 2 walkies.

After the group had warmed up to her, (including Mike and El,) they had all gotten each other a gift for Christmas. Mike got Will a walkman, El got Mike tickets to Indiana Jones, Max got El a bike, Will got Dustin X-Men comics, and Dustin and Lucas both got Max a supercomm. So Max ended up with two supercomms.

Max always had one tuned into channel 9, but the other was on channel 11. She reached out to El one night when she was feeling courageous. Mike had gone to Hawaii on Winter Vacation, and El was noticeably more lonely. She called El to keep her company that night.

“Hey El? Over,” Max said into the walkie.

“Who is this?” El replied. Max wondered if she should reply. She had never had a one on one discussion about anything with El before now, and she was very very nervous. She took a deep breath, calmed her heart rate, and spoke into the walkie talkie.

“It’s Zoomer. Over.”

“Max?” El replied, almost instantly.

“Yep, it’s me,” Max paused, trying to think of what to say. It felt like a few minutes, but in actuality she managed to come up with something in a matter of seconds. “I noticed you seemed a little bit out of it recently, when we were at the arcade. Are you alright? Over.”

El took a second to reply. “I miss Mike. And why do you finish your sentences with ‘over’?”

Max giggled. “I finish with ‘over’ because the walkies only allow one person to speak at a time, so it’s to let you know when I’m done speaking. If you hold the button while I’m talking you won’t hear me. Over.”

They continued to bond over various topics, such as Max’s obsession with skateboarding, to El’s love for soap operas, and even Max’s secret ability to play the piano, drums, and guitar. El noted that she was destined to be a rockstar, which put the biggest smile on Max’s face. Max loved listening to El talk. She was being accepted by the only other girl in the party, and she finally felt like she had a friend who could relate to her. She was always outcast in California.

It was the 29th of January, 1986. Over a year later. Max had been listening to the radio when it suddenly shut off, and her walkie was tuned automatically to channel 6. She knew El could mess with small things in her room from her hut in the woods. (She wasn’t that far away, Max was actually the closest to El geographically.) But she usually did it to mess with Max, or make her listen to good music. This felt different.

Max closed the book she was reading, and went over to grab her walkie. She almost spoke into it to ask what El was doing when she heard her voice go through.

“Mike? Are you there? Over,” El stammered. Max knew that El wanted her to listen to this, and kept quiet.

“Yeah El, what’s up? Over,” Mike replied, concerned.

“Mike, there’s something I need to tell you,” She said slowly. Mike waited for her continued response, as she didn’t end her phrase with ‘over’. “I feel like you and I aren’t really good for each other. Over.” She was stuttering like crazy. Max had been biting at her nails, scared for what would come out of this. *Why had El tuned her into this channel? Why did she need to hear this?* Max thought to herself. She so badly wanted to pipe up and ask El all her burning questions. But that wouldn’t be necessary.

“Why do you think that, El? Over.” He didn’t sound stressed or upset. As a matter of fact, he sounded... *relaxed*. Why would he sound relaxed?

“Because I don’t like you, like in a boyfriend-girlfriend way,” She said. “I think,” she paused, “ *I think I’m in love with a girl.* ”

2. Punks on the Playground

Before Max could say anything, the supercomm shut itself off. She couldn't turn it back on either, it was being held off. *El didn't want her to hear the rest of the conversation*, Max thought. It only made sense, as that is a personal conversation. Max tried to continue her book, but her mind was racing. *Why did El want me to hear that? Was that girl she was in love with me? Was I the only one who was listening in on that conversation?* She decided to talk to Lucas.

Lucas picked up fairly quickly. "What do you want, Max, it's 10:30 on a Wednesday night, I'm trying to sleep. Over."

"Did your walkie turn itself on earlier? Over" Max jabbed.

"No, that's ridiculous. Any other dumb questions?" Lucas retorted.

"Yes, one more. Do you remember why I dumped you?" Max asked.

Lucas took a few seconds to reply. "You didn't want your parents finding out you were dating a black kid, right? Over."

"And?"

"And the cliché 'It's not working out, bla bla bla, we can still be friends though, etc' ramble. Over."

"Okay, I was just wondering. Thanks for taking that well, by the way. My delivery on that was abysmal. Over."

"Yeah, I know you meant well. But I gotta sleep. Over and out, Max."

"See you later, stalker," Max finished. She sighed a sigh of relief. Lucas didn't know about Max's *issue* that caused her to dump him. All she needed to know was how El knew.

"Max? Come in, it's El, Over." Right on time.

"Hey, El, quick question: why did you make me listen to your

confession to Mike? Over.” Max probed. She needed to know if and how El knew. Nobody was allowed to know, because if word got out, her parents would kill her.

“I needed to tell both you and Mike at the same time. Don’t worry, he took it well. Apparently he likes Will now, so that made things way easier,” El replied.

“I can assume so, over,” Max spoke.

“But I need to ask one favor from you,” El whispered, “Can we meet at the elementary school playground tomorrow at 3:15? Over.”

“I can make that work. But I do have a question for you, over,” Max said.

“Is it quick? I need to sleep soon, over,” El sighed. Max took a deep breath, knowing that if this went wrong then it could change their relationship forever.

“How did you know about me?” Max demanded.

“W-what? Over,” El responded. *Did she really not know?*

“Do you know why I really broke up with Lucas? Over.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, over,” El panicked.

“Well I might as well tell you then. I broke up with Lucas because I’m also in love with a girl, over.”

Max skipped last block to get to the park before El. El never responded when Max said what she said, and it terrified her that maybe it had gone the wrong way. By the time El had arrived, she was shivering non-stop, both out of fear and cold. She was sitting on the bench beside the playground, with her skateboard on it’s side behind the cold wooden seat. She didn’t notice El walk up until she was right in front of her. The redhead looked up and saw a curly-haired brunette looking nervously down at her. She stood up and immediately pulled El into a hug.

“Christ, Max, you’re freezing,” El said worriedly as she took off one of her eight-thousand coats and handed it to Max. She did not hesitate to put it on and zip it up. Within a single second she had the massive jacket on and was tightly embracing the psychic once again. El stood for a second before hugging back.

“I have been waiting here for more than an hour, El,” Max whispered into El’s ear. “I skipped last period so I could get here fast enough.”

“You shouldn’t skip classes, it will affect your marks,” El retorted.

“Who cares, you’re warm and that’s all that matters right now,” Max whispered. Neither of them needed to say it. Max in El’s arms felt right. They both knew how the other felt about them, and that their “forbidden love” could get them killed. But they didn’t care. Max would rather die young knowing that she got to be with the person she loves over living into her 70s, marrying a boring salesman and living in South Carolina.

“It’s really cold,” El laughed.

“Yeah, you should take me home and warm me up.” Max’s voice was more at ease, a slightly higher pitch than her regular talking voice. Her muscles were relaxed, her breathing and heart rate steady. For a punk skateboarding kid, the last you’d expect is her to be submissive. El, on the other hand, her actions seemed reasonable. El was the kind to fight for the person she loves, protect them at all costs, and make sure no harm comes to them.

They were perfect.

3. Admittance

El took Max back to her cabin in the woods, and wrapped her up in as many blankets as possible. Max had never actually been to the cabin, but now that she had, she could say it was incredibly nice. The aesthetic of the kitchen, the couches and TV, everything was perfect. Not how she'd imagined it, considering she thought El lived in a carved out tree stump for the longest time, but it was nice. Somehow they had heating, which she didn't understand. But it didn't matter. This was her new home.

"I'm gonna make you hot chocolate, is that okay?" El yelled from the kitchen. Max only raised a thumbs-up into El's view. About 2 minutes later, El came back with 2 mugs of hot chocolate, and wrapped herself in Max's blankets. Or to be more accurate, Max's blankets consumed El.

They spent the next hour watching whatever reruns came on the TV of old cartoons, as Max slowly drifted to sleep, curled up into El. Before Max fell asleep, she needed to make an important phone call.

One ring. Two rings. Click!

"Hello? Who is this?"

"Hi mom, it's Max. I was wondering if I could sleep over at Jane's for the night? We have a big test tomorrow and we need to study," Max said, trying to avoid slurring her words together and making it sound as if she was awake.

"I guess that's alright, let me check wi-"

"Okay thanks bye I'll see you tomorrow!" Max didn't want her mom to check with her stepdad. He would have said no or demanded to meet the parents. Thankfully, her dad was going out of town this evening, so he wouldn't get to participate in the dinner discussion that would decide the fate of Max's life. She returned to the couch, and snuggled into the crook of El's arm once again.

“What was that about?” El questioned.

“I don’t want to go home tonight, I wanna stay here with you,” Max mumbled. “Besides, I can’t go back out there. I don’t have a proper jacket.”

Max began to zone out of the show, and gave up trying to pay attention and instead tried to fall asleep. El was soft, and warm. She smelled like petrichor and waffles. She was safe, she felt like home. A real one.

Max woke up to hearing mild yelling between El and Hopper. Also she was in a bed, *When did that happen?* She assumed that El had moved her to the bed because she had fallen asleep. *But why was there yelling?*

Max got up, brushed her long ginger hair out of her face, and walked out into the main den area of the building. El and Hopper were arguing, just out of view. They didn’t know she was there so she decided to listen in on their argument.

“Why would you bring someone home?! You know that nobody is to stay here after dark, that’s the rule!” Hopper yelled.

“She couldn’t go home, her parents are like papa! Her brother is mean and her father is cruel!” El retaliated.

“That is not my issue, this will not become a safe-house for your friends because they have family issu-”

“I love her, Hopper. I won’t just let her go into that place and suffer,” El shouted. Max gasped silently. It had all been subtext, they never said they loved each other, or even audibly agreed that they were dating. They just ended up that way. Max scratched her wrist out of nervousness.

“What did you say?” Hopper said, significantly quieter than before.

“I - Love - Her. I love her,” El was dramatic and wild.

“I-” Hopper tried to say something, but couldn’t. He embraced his child, using physical support to say what his words could not. Max

was in tears. She was surprised nobody had noticed she was listening.

“You can’t go around blurting out that you love a girl, El,” Hopper said.

“Why not? I love her, and that’s all that matters,” El replied.

“Because not everybody thinks that a girl loving a girl is normal. Very few people do, actually. You’ll be bullied and harassed, and so will she. It isn’t safe, El,” Hopper said. Max had been peeking around the corner to see what was going on, when Hopper caught her eyes. Max immediately ducked back behind the wall and into the other room. A moment later, El rushed in to find Max sitting against the wall with her knees held to her chest, tears running down her face. She rushed over to the crying girl, holding her tightly, and reassuring her.

“It’s gonna be alright, you’re alright. I’m here, everything is fine.” But Max couldn’t stop bawling. *It was not fine*, she thought.

4. Banished From the Party

Max was going to be late to D&D night at Mike's. She was rushing out the door, her left shoe almost falling off her foot and her arm not in the jacket sleeve. As she hopped on her board, she heard Neil call from the house.

"Where do you think you're going young lady? You have some explaining to do about Thursday night," he shouted, as if he were on a sitcom and the mic operator was an idiot who held the boom too high.

Max frustratedly got off her skateboard and went back inside, and sat on the couch. "What do you want to know?"

"Whose house were you at?"

"Jane Hopper's house," Max retorted.

"And this Jane, is she from school?"

"Yes, she is. She's a very nice girl from school. She cares about people, unlike most other high schoolers."

"Where does she live?" Neil wondered. Max panicked. She lived in the middle of a forest, she couldn't just say *oh yeah she just lives in the woods, no biggie*. She'd be killed.

"I can't tell you."

"Why not?"

"I just can't." Max was getting nervous. Her dad would find out where El lived or she would never see the sun again.

"Then you're grounded." Neil obviously wanted information, and he wasn't getting it. He needed to resort to more drastic measures.

"NO!" Max stood up, standing over Neil, who was seated in a chair about a yard and a half in front of her

“Then tell me where your little playmate lives!”

“I’m not telling you where my girlfr-” Max cut herself off. She just outed herself to her father, and possibly just put herself in her worst nightmare.

“Your what?” Neil asked, anger plaguing his voice.

“M-my friend. I’m not telling you where she lives.”

“You didn’t say friend, did you? What did you say?!” Neil was nearing screaming, Susan was standing behind Neil, and Billy’s door could be heard opening from down the hall. She wasn’t going to get out of this easy.

“No.”

“What did you say?” Neil’s volume came down.

“No,” Max said more firmly.

“What did you call her?” Neil was getting louder again.

“No.”

“ What did you call her, Maxine?! Tell me now, or you won’t see the sun for a month! ” Max was certain Neil could be heard from halfway down the street. Billy was standing at the entrance to the living room, his body partially blocking the entrance. Max needed a way out of this. But there wasn’t one.

So she gave up trying to hide it.

“I said, I’m not telling you where my *girlfriend* lives.”

“So what, you’re some kind of *dyke* now, are you?” Neil spoke with no remorse. His words cut and stung like flaming knives. But Max didn’t show any pain.

“So what if I am? So what if I love a girl? It doesn’t matter! I can love whoever I want and nobody can stop me!” Max shouted.

“Well tell your girlfriend that she loves a homeless kid, because I will *not* be housing a dyke.” Max broke into tears. “Get. Out. Of my house.”

Max stormed out of the living room, Billy stepping aside to let her pass. She grabbed her board and rushed as fast as she could to, well, anywhere but here.

“That’s right! Ain’t no faggot living under my roof! Stay the hell away from my hou-” Neil was stopped by Billy grabbing his shoulder. Neil turned around to see a fist flying towards his face.

“No one talks to my sister like that. *No one.* ” The last thing she saw before the house was of view was Billy being thrown to the pavement outside the house. But she didn’t care. She didn’t want to be anywhere near that house.

She showed up at Mike’s house a half hour late, with tears streaming down her face. She came in the basement door, and tried to hide her face by facing the wall as she closed the door.

“Where were you?” said Mike.

“Yeah, we’ve been waiting here for half an hour, what took you so long??” Dustin chimed in.

Everyone kept asking her where she had been, what took her so long, and the like while she continued to hide her face and attempted to pull herself together as she removed her shoes. She threw her shoes at the ground in anger, and stomped over to the table, and before she could get to the table she saw El, who had been silent, and looked at her with only love and affection, as well as concern.

She broke.

She stopped in her tracks, tears welling up in her eyes, and burst into tears. El immediately got up and brought her over to the couch to sit her down, and began supporting her.

“Shh, it’s okay Max, everything is fine,” El said calmly. Everyone

watched on, speechless and unable to move.

“No, it’s not okay, it’s not fucking okay! None of this is okay!!” Max yelled. El looked at Mike to confirm that nobody was upstairs, and he nodded.

“Max, what happened?” El questioned.

“They found out,” Max barely spit out, her words mashed together and her tears staining El’s coat. “Neil and Susan found out.” Max didn’t have to say what they found out, El just knew. El knew her parents would react poorly if they ever knew their daughter was gay, and she knew that the one thing she feared most in this world was coming to life.

“What did they find out?” Mike asked, but nobody answered. El glanced at Mike again, saying *I think we need some time alone*, without moving a muscle. Mike understood perfectly, and took everyone else upstairs. Max continued to bawl her eyes out into El’s chest. She had nowhere to go. She had nothing but a skateboard to her name.

5. Possibilities

Max never told the group what happened. At least, not that night. They ended up not playing D&D, instead playing NES after Max had calmed down, which took a while. They managed to beat Super Mario Bros that night, in about an hour, with El taking on Bowser at the end and being the one to beat him. They each took turns playing, switching off on every level or death. They also played a bit of Pac-Man (Max and Dustin ended up tying their high scores), Balloon Fight, Legend of Zelda, and more.

Max felt like she was with a real family. A group who would love her unconditionally. Whether she loved girls or boys, she knew that they would care about her all the same. It was reassuring. She loved them too. Having her class re-assigned to Rogue in D&D, but she still ultimately preferred Zoomer. That wasn't a class in D&D though, so she had to switch to Rogue.

Eventually, the time came when everyone had to go home. People started trickling out, one by one, until those who were left were Will, Max, El, and Mike. Mike was playing Bubble Bobble, and El and Max sat on the couch behind him. Will had gone upstairs to grab something. Eventually, Max decided to speak up.

"What's gonna happen when I have to go home?" Max asked. Mike paused the game and turned around. "I mean, I have nowhere to go." The basement door clicked open, and Will came downstairs.

"What do you mean?" Mike asked. "Isn't Asshole McGee gonna come pick you up?" Mike was, of course referring to Billy.

"I doubt it, me and Neil, well..." Max paused to consider her words. "We had a falling out, so to speak."

"What happened?" Will asked. Max looked over at El, looking for confirmation on whether or not to tell them what had happened. They communicated without speaking. After a second, Max nodded slightly, and slid over next to El.

"Is the door closed?" El asked Will. Will nodded to confirm that yes,

it was closed. "Okay. I don't know where to start this story." Max knew. She grabbed El's hand and snuggled in close, resting her head on El's shoulder, her thumb feeling the bumps and grooves of El's fingers.

"Does this help?" Max asked the two boys. Both of them shook their heads.

"Well, this may come as a shock. Me and Max are—"

"Dating," Max cut in, "We're dating." Mike looked slightly shocked, and Will was a bit relieved.

"Yes, we are dating. And while you two probably accept it," El spoke softly.

"Max's parents didn't," Mike and Will spoke in unison. Max hid her face from the group. She didn't want to cry in front of them again.

"Okay, well, if it helps, I like boys and girls," Mike chimed in.

"And I just like boys," Will said, glancing over at Mike. "Particularly our lovely GM and Paladin, Miguel Wheelson."

Max giggled. "I'm sorry, who?" She spoke, looking at Will in confusion. Will simply pointed at Mike, who had the most shocked face she had ever seen. She burst out laughing when she saw him. His eyes were wide, mouth open like he was gonna say something, but couldn't spit it out. Eventually he came back to reality as Will sat down next to him and mimicked Max's position, with Mike taking place of El.

"Alright, well I guess this is a thing now," Mike said.

"Did you not know Will was gay? I mean, it was so obvious. His reaction to being asked to dance in grade 8 was priceless," El said, laughing.

"To be fair, she was very demanding about it. 'Zombie Boy, dance with me,'" Will spoke in a mock feminine voice. Everyone was laughing. Max had smiled for the first time that evening. Will and Mike had both let a weight off their chests by coming out as Gay and

Bi respectively, and El had Max by her side, no fear of what people would do to her. Max wished the night would never end.

The time came when it was time for people to go home. Mike hugged Will goodbye, lightly kissing his cheek as Jonathan came by to pick him up. Will didn't have his bike because it went missing after the events of 1983, and he never got another. Hopper came by to pick up El, and Max didn't know whether to go with El or find somewhere else to stay. She wouldn't have to decide, though.

"Max, are you coming?" El poked her head back through the door.

"Coming? Coming where?"

"Home, dummy. Let's go."

Max nearly burst into tears, a smile crept across her face and she ran into El's arms and embraced her. Hopper and Mike watched on awkwardly, and you could hear Hopper yelling at them from the inside of the vehicle.

"See you later Mike!" Max beamed.

"See ya 'round, Mad Max!"

Max and El got back to the cabin, and after getting inside, began preparing for bed. Max changed into a pair of grey sweatpants and a blue Aeropostale shirt from El's closet, whereas El put on a knee-length pink sleeping gown and a pair of red PJ pants.

"You can have the bed if you want, I'll sleep on the couch. Is that fine?" El whispered. Max looked over at her lover, after having gotten changed.

"Yeah, I think so," she returned, "We'll see."

They both went into the separate rooms, and prepared to sleep. Max tried as hard as she could, but she just could not get out of her head the way Neil looked at her. *Is everyone else like this?* She thought. *Does everyone else think that I'm disgusting for loving a girl?*

She tossed and turned, trying to find the sweet spot so she could sleep but it was to no avail. Tears were beginning to form, her brain moving a mile a minute, rushing through possibility after possibility of what could happen to her simply for loving a girl. After what felt like hours, she ended up rolling off the bed, and hit the floor with a surprisingly soft thump.

“El?” Max whispered, making her way into the den area of the cabin. The TV was on at a low volume, and El was hunched in front of it watching semi-intently. Upon hearing Max call her name, she turned around, and saw her girlfriend in tears, wrapped in the blankets from her bed.

“Max, what’s wrong?” El asked, “Couldn’t sleep?” Max nodded, and then sat down next to El.

“I just kept thinking about all the things that could happen because I love you, you know? Like how they could hurt you, or hurt me, or completely outcast us. And I don’t want any of that shit to happen,” Max divulged. “I don’t want to be hurt by this.”

El wrapped her arm around Max, while Max allowed El into the significantly larger blankets she had. They assumed the position they were in the night Max slept over for the first time, which had only been last night. It felt like forever during school. Max had no classes with El, and El was in Jazz Band so she had to practice at lunch. They met up briefly at the arcade, when Max came in as El was leaving.

“El?” Max whispered.

“Yes?”

“Thank you.”

El couldn’t help but crack a smile, as she leaned down and kissed Max’s forehead, before whispering the words “I love you” into her ear. Max’s eyes widened. She had never told El that she loved her, only that she was in love with a girl. But that girl was the girl in front of her. And she needed desperately to show her how much she loved her.

Max looked up at El, before straightening her back. They were on eye level. Faces, mere inches apart, though El's head was aimed at the TV. Max lightly tilted El's face towards hers. This was it. Less than an inch between them. It was now or never. And Max decided now.

She closed her eyes, and pressed her lips against El's. She pulled back very quickly, and saw El looking wide-eyed at her. Max smiled, and El snapped back to her senses before pulling Max right back in. Her fingers intertwined with ginger hair, and Max's hand grasping the curly brown hair. Max planted her free hand behind her for support. She forgot about the possibilities, the futures, all of that. Right now, she was with the person she loved. And that's all that mattered.

El pulled away from Max, and opened her eyes. They both started giggling, and Max dropped her head to El's shoulder, letting her entire weight fall into El's arms.

"You are so cute, did you know that?" El whispered, "The cutest person I've ever laid eyes on."

"Nah, you're definitely cuter." Max adjusted her posture so she was facing El. El planted a kiss on Max's cheek, and Max beamed.

El moved the TV into the bedroom, and they both curled up in the bed to watch. The soothing light from the TV flashing assisted in helping Max remain calm after the events of the night. Max wasn't watching, opting instead to take the opportunity to snuggle with her lover, her ear on El's chest, listening to the slow, steady heartbeat as she dozed off. El wasn't paying attention. She pretended to, but she was actually listening to Max's breathing as she also began to doze off. The sound of the television was meaningless to them. They were at peace with each other.

6. Heist on the Cabin in the Woods

The sizzling of bacon could be heard from the bedroom. Hopper still lived in his rundown shack by the lake, so after El got into high school he stopped coming by in the mornings. El had learned how to cook breakfast. After growing sick from eating exclusively eggos, she decided it was time to learn how to make other food. She bought a cookbook with money she earned from mowing lawns and other things. Hopper always came by with groceries whenever he could.

Max slept peacefully while El cooked up breakfast, which was bacon, scrambled eggs, and waffles (actual waffles, not Eggos). El had on a large T-Shirt Mike had loaned her about a year ago, and sweatpants. Her hair was hidden in a backwards baseball cap, as she was too lazy to put it up. She turned the burners on the stove off, and served her meal.

Max wasn't woken up by El, nor the glass of orange juice she was about to pour hitting the ground. Max was woken up by something outside, something set up almost two years ago as a security measure. *The trip wire in the front.*

There was an emergency switch that had been put in place that shut off all the electricity in the cabin. Using her telepathy, El flipped the switch and bolted the door. Flipping the switch also sent out a distress signal to Hopper. The signal wasn't morse, it was 16 short beeps. She also bolted the bedroom door to protect Max, which had 8 locks put in place so that if someone were to get through the first door, they couldn't get through the second.

Max knew what was happening. She had the tripwire explained to her the first time she visited the cabin. It had been expanded to surround the entire building for extra security, so that you couldn't just walk around the trees.

Eleven prepared for the worst. She didn't know who was outside. For all she knew, Billy had somehow found them and had come to get Max. She wished it was Billy. But the quick stomping up the steps, followed by loud banging on the door, that couldn't have been Billy. Billy was afraid of Max, he had learned to leave her alone after the

fight with Harrington. He had figured out how being a good person works, so if it were him, he would not be stomping his way up to the front of the cabin. He wouldn't be banging on the door.

“Open up, Maxine! I know you're in there!” Someone yelled. Max wasn't in her bed, but instead had made her way into the crawlspace under the house. She knew who was at the door, and she was terrified. She knew El had been in the other room, but she knew fully well that El could fend for herself and didn't worry about her.

The banging got louder. The yelling got louder. “Open the goddamn door, Maxine! If I have to kick this door down, don't think for a second I won't!” El had the pitcher of orange juice in her hand, ready to throw it at whoever set foot in that door. Her entire body was trembling. If the pitcher didn't have a lid, it would be empty from her unsteady hand. The banging of fists turned into kicks. The walls shook slightly. The door began to cave. Neither the locks or the hinges would hold. Then, in almost the blink of an eye, the door was on the ground.

“Where the fuck is my daughter?” Growled the man in front of her. El hesitated, throwing the pitcher just too late. Neil had seen her telegraph her motion and caught the pitcher, before throwing it to the side. He stepped over the fallen door towards El. El stepped back, frantically looking for something to defend herself with. But there was nothing.

He grabbed El by the collar and lifted her up to eye-level, almost a foot off the ground, and pushed her against the wall. “Where the holy fuck is my daughter?!” He screamed, saliva splattering on her face. She didn't answer, instead reaching for the open cupboard of plates, frantically trying to attract one or five. Her nose bled as the plates shook. Max was still in the crawlspace, listening to everything happening, and tried to make her way out. She got out, back in the room, and tried to unbolt the bedroom door, but El had been holding it shut. She was not willing at all to let her girlfriend go.

Neil had been screaming in El's face while she desperately tried to grab a plate. Then everything seemed to slow. Neil's hand had moved to her throat, his other hand winding up to punch her in the face. All the plates flew off the shelf in quick succession. Less than an eighth

of an inch of space left between her face and his fist, before the plates made contact with his head. He dropped her to the ground, El being left gasping for air, and Neil reached for the back of his head. He looked to the ground behind him, seeing the shattered plates on the floor. He then looked down at the mess of a girl, in tears, face bloodied.

Neil reached to grab the girl once again, but El was on her toes this time. She flicked her head to the side, and his face smashed into the wall. She flung him backwards, threw remotes and cutlery at his torso and face, before lifting him into the air.

“You will leave Max alone. You will never come to find her. What happened today will never leave your lips. Do you understand?” El spoke. Neil nodded, before being dropped to the ground. He stood and turned to flee, before meeting Chief of Police Jim Hopper’s fist.

“You are under arrest for breaking and entering, as well as assaulting a child. You have the right to remain silent, anything you say can and will be held against you in a court of law. You have the right to an attorney, if you do not have an attorney one will be appointed to you. Do you have anything else to say?” Hopper restrained his yelling. Before she knew it, Neil was in cuffs and being escorted out the door and towards the police van. He may have showed up to the police station with more bruises than he left the cabin with, but then again, he attacked the chief of police’s child.

The bedroom door bolts came undone in an instant, and Max rushed out of the room towards El, and cradled her the way El had cradled Max after her falling out. El was in shambles, hugging Max as tight as she could without crushing her.

“Shh, it’s okay. He’s gonna leave us alone from now on. He’s gone. You did a good job,” Max whispered softly.

“I could’ve killed him, Max. I’m a monster, I almost killed him,” El bawled.

“You’re not a monster, El. You saved me, alright? You saved my life,” Max returned. The two girls didn’t move from the floor for quite some time. Hours later after Hopper returned and they still hadn’t

moved. El even fell asleep in that spot, which let Max get up and retrieve a blanket for the both of them.

7. Stitches

Divorce wasn't the only reason the Mayfield-Hargrove family moved to Hawkins from lovely California.

Neil Hargrove was facing trial on many many counts of child neglect and child abuse. He needed to escape California to avoid going to jail. Somehow he managed to succeed, for over 2 years no less. It wasn't until news broke that he was being arrested for breaking and entering and assault that they managed to find him. Susan wasn't arrested, however Max was taken out of her custody and put into foster care in Hawkins.

"What do you mean I have to switch schools?!" Max yelled at her new foster mother.

"That girl you were with is the whole reason you're in this mess, so you can't be seeing her!" Denise yelled back.

She couldn't believe it. She was put into a home with three lousy brats and two grossly mediocre parents. It was still better than being nearly beaten every night. But being taken away from her real family? Now that was a whole other story.

Max tried everything. She tried stealing a walkie talkie, but she lived out of range. She tried sneaking out to Mike's D&D nights, but she would always be caught. She tried skating to Hawkins High, but it was too far. She was ripped away from the people she cared about, her home, the girl she loved. Thankfully her parents didn't suspect she was gay, but that was a tiny silver lining in a black black cloud.

Her pillowcase was permanently tear-stained.

Her tough-girl attitude that the party knew back in '84 when she first moved to Hawkins resurfaced. She was failing her classes, stayed out late, got taken home by the police multiple times. When her foster parents asked her about it, she always shrugged it off like it didn't matter, like she didn't care. But as soon as she got into her room, she turned off the lights and hid under the blankets trying desperately to wake up, like it was a bad dream. But daylight never showed.

The closest she got to seeing El was on Valentine's Day, a Friday. She lied to her foster parents and said she had a date, a senior named Miguel, and they let her go. She went to Mike's house, taking a few backroads to avoid being tracked by her personally assigned control freaks. But it wasn't enough. She landed in the driveway and they pulled up. Jason, foster father, grabbed her by the wrist and tossed her in the back seat of the car.

She made eye contact with El that night. Her curly brown hair was accentuated with a lotus, blue eyeshadow and lipstick gracing her beautiful face. How she longed to see her again, and as soon as she was given the opportunity, it was ripped away like a band-aid.

It took 4 months to figure out what happened to Max. She never said a goodbye before she was put in foster care, she just vanished without a trace. But with the assistance of her sighting on the 14th of February with two unfamiliar individuals, Joyce, Mike, Will, and El managed to track her to a foster home 13 miles from Central Hawkins. They got some coffee, just Joyce and Max, and they discussed what would happen. After an hour of talking, they came to a conclusion.

Maxine Amelia Byers.

Joyce filed the adoption papers as soon as she could, setting up a room for Max where Jonathan used to sleep before he moved to New York to study photography and film. The room remained uninhabited for another two months while the adoption papers were processed. Those two months wore on Max like sandpaper and the blistering sun.

However, Max wouldn't be returning to Hawkins High with the reputation she had. She brought her grades back up, got her arrest records wiped (the legality of how she did it is debatable), and even helped out around the neighborhood. Things were looking up. But the days grew longer, days turned to weeks and Max started to grow unsure if she would ever see her lover again. But just as her hope was about to flake, she heard a knock at the door.

"We're here to pick up Maxine, she's been adopted."

She finally arrived, the sun having set, and the stars shining. She entered the Byers home - her home - once again for the first time in half a year. She took in the scent she had so badly missed, reminded herself of the feel of the sofa, the sound of the TV static she fell asleep to more times than she's willing to admit, the holes in the floor from when she took out Billy. Everything was almost identical to how she had left it. But the door at the end of the hall was open. There was a feeling she hadn't felt in an impossibly long time.

El was here.

She sprinted down the hall and into the room her new room, not stopping to take in the skateboard rack or the DigDug arcade cabinet. She had one thing she had wanted to do for the last half a year.

El looked up at Max, who had jumped onto the bed where El was seated. Max hugged her girlfriend tighter than ever before. El hugged back, holding on for dear life as if she let go she would lose Max again. Max's face met El's without hesitation. El's hands gripped the ginger hair as if it was instinct. Max cupped the brunette's face in her hands, shifting to a similar position to the girl under her. Their legs became entangled, both of their instincts acting to keep the other with them. The door closed, blankets swooped over their bodies as they continued to kiss like the world was going to end. After a brief amount of time, Max fell asleep in El's arms. Graced by the scent of lemongrass and sleep Max had, El fell asleep not long afterward. And for the first time in far too long, Max slept peacefully.